

# University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Gainesville, Florida, USA

## QB Graham Mertz

### Press Conference



Florida Gators 24, UCF Knights 13

#### Q. Is that a bye week beard?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I don't really know what we're doing but we're committing. First time identify ever had a beard. Trying to grow it out like that. That's pretty good.

#### Q. Graham, over here. Congrats on the victory today. Talk a little about the cohesiveness between you and DJ and the offensive line, because you guys were giving enough time to find your targets and you didn't get sacked, which was a bonus there.

GRAHAM MERTZ: There was one that was kind of -- it was fully my fault but, yeah.

#### Q. Yeah.

GRAHAM MERTZ: They did -- I mean, Jake Slaughter, guy out there right now, he does a great job of leading that group and really setting the tone. We knew what kind of game it was going to be. There would be multiple in their pressures and their fronts and they were. They were in the front the first half, so we did a great job of communicating, telling what we're seeing and making the right adjustments so they did a great job up front.

#### Q. But what's the progression been like since that first game against Miami to now?

GRAHAM MERTZ: With just the cohesiveness?

#### Q. Yeah, with that offensive line, yes.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think that the more you get into the season, obviously guys that maybe it might be their first year playing or it's different when you have a new group as an offensive line and you're kind of building that chemistry, that comradery, knowing how the right guard plays with the right tackle and how to communicate stuff like that.

They did a great job of every day just continuing to work,

continuing to develop and just getting a little bit better on their communication, their communication with me and their communication with DJ, so as a group, O-line and quarterback, we got to be in tune, we got to be one and we did a good job of that tonight.

#### Q. Graham, you guys ate up almost eight minutes of clock on that first drive, 15 plays, 75 yards. Was that the goal of that scripted series and how do you feel like that set the tone for the first half?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I moon, it wasn't necessarily the goal. I think that just the way we wanted to play the game in that opening script, really just going into the game knowing what we wanted to do. It was being multiple, mixing up tempo, really trying to make the defense feel they can't be right. If they bring a pressure, replace it with RPO, stuff like that, so it's fun. It's kind of like playing point guard. That's what coach always says. So for me, it's any job to if they bring 7, find the open RPO.

So, yeah, the drive, it was a long one, 15 place, but we knew we had to set the tone early. We knew it was going to be a physical game and we had to run the ball. The O-line did a great job. Skill players did a fantastic job, YAC, getting open, stuff like that, so it was a great first drive. We definitely need to -- that was a point of emphasis. Start fast. Start fast. Start fast. And I thought we did a job on offense tonight.

#### Q. And then having Eugene out, Aidan out and then Marcus out, how did you think Tank Hawkins stepped up tonight? I know you turned to him a lot.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, it was funny, I was in the hotel with DJ and we woke up this morning and I was like I just feel like Tank's going to make some plays today, man. I don't know what it is. But, no, I did know. He had a great week of prep and I think that's one thing you see translate to the game, especially in our offense, in any ^ s of ^ offense, when you go through the week of prep, how do guys go about their business? Are they taking care of their body? Are they executing on their reps when their number is called during the week? Tank did a great job of that and he stepped into that and had a great night.



**Q. Billy said that you guys showed up with a mentality, I think is how he put it, just as a team. What did you see there and just being able to seize the momentum and really put your foot on their throat and get that lead.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think honestly, I know coach -- I was just in here when he talked about it but during the bye week. Gumbs talked about it a little bit, but we set the tone we're like look, we are competing this week. This is not a recovery week. We're oh going in there and we're going to work every single practice that we have. We're going to compete and it got heated, it got fun, but that's been a theme for us going into this week, every chance you get to go compete, you need to be ready to rock and you got to go. I think we had a great week -- coach incorporated some of that point stem stuff into the week this week which was fun for our good-on-good periods. The guys were just ready to compete today. When you're in that locker room before the game looking around at the guys, you can kind of get a sense after you've played five years of college football of how the team's feeling and they're ready to go. Guys are communicating, supporting each other, hyping each other up and that's what I want to see in the locker room before a game.

**Q. Billy talks about complementary football a lot and when the defense is swarming like that, making plays, sacking the quarterback, how much does that energize the overall effort?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: It was big. It was big and we need to do a better job on ^ s of ^ offense in the second half. We got to put points up. They did a fantastic job, can't thank those guys enough, but, yeah, like you said, complementary football. If we can go out there and we can play our best in all three phases, we can be a really good team but we got to do that consistently and we have to harp on that every single day.

Defense did a fantastic job tonight. It was fun to watch because you kind of, when you're on the sideline you watch your drive, you talk with coach and you're talking through stuff and you get a little bit of time just to kind of look up at the jumbotron and see them do all their celebrations and that's a fun group, so unique celebration but they're having fun, man. So it's good.

**Q. Sorry to take a third one, but did you see Jeremy's punt?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: How could you not?

**Q. Okay. I didn't know.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Dude, I got to say something --

**Q. What did you ^ think ^ thank you about that punt? That thing chucked up like a wedge, right?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah. I wish my golf game was like that. (Laughter) Wish I could spin it like that. No. Jeremy is an elite punter. It's funny. He always comes up to me pretty much every day, it's like our running joke where he's like, hey, can I just get like two punts today? Three punts and I'm like no, man, you can't. So when we need him and he goes out there, he does a fantastic job. He is extremely elite at what he does, so he's a weapon. He's consistently a weapon. Can't thank him enough for it.

**Q. Graham, just bouncing off what had been asked before about the second half struggles, what specifically heading in now into the real meat of the schedule, starting in Knoxville next weekend needs to be done to make sure the ^ s of ^ offense and you said, you know, the ^ s of ^ offense has got to be more steady, what needs to happen so we don't have a 24-point first half and a zero-point second half.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, it's a good question. It definitely just comes down to -- I'm going to say it again but it comes down to execution, we need all 11 communicating at a high level and all 11 doing their job because if you have one guy not doing their job, then the play could possibly not work, so we need all 11 on the same page. We need to have elite communication and we need to execute when the play is called so we had the opportunities but there's one we got a penalty and a few others we stalled out, a few third downs so we just got to do a better job executing when the time's -- what was it? Third and six the one I threw the bad -- I got to throw a better ball. Little stuff like that that we can all address, we can all fix.

**Q. And then obvious you mentioned first drive goes great, get the touchdown. Second drive, you know, where you're a quarterback is a punt and then DJ comes in, three plays later, you know, you guys are in the end zone.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah.

**Q. Just talk about how him coming in in that moment really sparked the ^ s of ^ offense and how the two of you were able to complement each other so well in that moment.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think the biggest thing really going into that drive, we were on the sideline with coach O'Hara talking about the looks we were getting, the

pressures we were getting and they were playing behind it and our communication with coach, like Coach, this is what I'm seeing, DJ is looking at the film, he's like okay, I like that. We had that call and we're like okay. There's a high opportunity he's going to be open and he went out there and did a great job executing it. Chim ran a great route.

MODERATOR: We got Tyreek Sapp available in the back right corner.

GRAHAM MERTZ: If you want one-liners go up there. (Laughter) He's the king of it. Enjoy. Enjoy. (Laughter).

**Q. And then I know you mentioned Tank really got going today. Just talk about his emergence, what Badger's done once Trey's ready to come back.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Okay, Tank. Didn't know he had 60.

**Q. Yeah. Once Trey comes back, once Aidan comes back, how the receiving core, when everyone's fully healthy really will be able to drive.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: We got a really talented, really deep receiver group and they do a great job over the week, like I said, prepping. They're playing fast during the week and when we get those guys back, you ^ think ^ thank you about the Mississippi State game when ten different guys touched the rock. How can we spread the defense out, make them cover every inch of grass on that field. We're definitely blessed with the receiving core we have. It's young, fast, and a bunch of play makers. When all those guys come back, it'll be great to have them back.

**Q. Graham, I was going to ask you about Tank so I guess I'll move onto Tennessee.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Some Tank lovers in here. I like it. (Laughter) How can you -- yeah, Tank.

**Q. Just how much confidence does it give you to see the defense perform like that coming I have a the bye and as you move into -- everybody knows what's on the schedule.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think one thing like -- it's funny. Being able to play against them every day, I know what they have on their side of the ball. We watched the film as a team and we addressed things we need to get better at. They're a talented group. I've played against them since spring ball, a lot of reps against them. I know what they're capable of and it was great to go see them do it on the field on game day.

**Q. Did Badger pick you off?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Did Badger pick me off?

**Q. Yeah, on that pass he caught on the sideline. It looked like you were throwing --**

GRAHAM MERTZ: You got me, you got me. I was throwing it to Chim. I'm not going to lie. I threw it and I was like is that a pick? I just saw two hands snag it and I was like ooo and then I saw Badger cut up. But I was throwing it to Chim because we have. There are scramble rules where if you're on the line you're going to stem up and come back down so I thought he was going to come back because Chim was coming back friendly and I was going to plug it on him and Badger cut up at the last second and got it.

**Q. Just being a receiver.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Speedy. Speedy. Shocked me a little bit. Not going to lie.

**Q. So tonight I noticed you were getting a little mobile in the pocket at times, you know, running for it on that fourth downplay and then obvious you were basically like running up the sideline on said pass there. So just have you been trying to incorporate more variety to your game in the last few weeks just to, you know, keep the ^ s of ^ offense dynamic?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Love that question. Thanks for calling me mobile. (Laughter) No, I think it's a simple thing. For me, it was an area I wanted to improve on throughout the offseason. My body, my movement, my mobility, stuff like that, so whenever say a play breaks down, just being able to utilize that as another threat, defense matches the pattern, they got nobody for you, so being able to utilize that, get the yards you need and then every once in a while being able to pull a zone read when they're like there's no shot this guy's keeping it. Fourth and one will work. (Laughter) Appreciate you. Go Gators. Appreciate you, guys.

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